United Nations

Press Release

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Economic and Social Council opens debate on international economic policy; United Nations official says revitalized body could serve as an economic security council to deal with issues of global interdependence.

- To promote breast-feeding, the World Health Organization and UNICEF announce plan to make hospitals "baby friendly."

- United Nations Population Division releases report on world urbanization, saying nearly half of world's population lives in cities.

- United Nations Committee informs Secretary-General of grave problem of indebtedness facing several missions to United Nations.

- United Nations Environment Programme concludes eight-day meeting to negotiate treaty to protect world's biological diversity.

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Rafeeuddin Ahmed, Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs, has told the Economic and Social Council that a revitalized Council could serve as a kind of economic security council to deal with issues of global interdependence as well as situations requiring an immediate and comprehensive response.

Opening the debate on economic and social policy, Mr. Ahmed said that the issues to be dealt with by such a body would fill an important gap since those matters had not been considered in a coherent or comprehensive manner in either the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) or the Bretton Woods institutions.

The Council has before it a series of reports, including the World Economic Survey 1991, which forecasts zero economic growth for the world economy this year, representing a decline in per capita output of close to 2 per cent.

(more)

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The Survey, which raises a number of disturbing questions, says the economic situation in virtually all regions of the world is far from satisfactory and that, in light of present conditions, expectations for rapid improvement remain low.

The Survey concludes that global and regional economic problems are largely related to the economic policies of the industrialized countries, which have undergone major changes in the last decade.

Following a series of statements, participants at the meeting held an informal exchange with the Chairman of the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to address some of the issues.

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A plan to promote breast-feeding through the creation of "baby friendly" hospitals, has been announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The plan, which was adopted on 28 June at a meeting of pediatricians, obstetricians, community health workers and non-governmental organizations, in Ankara, Turkey, outlines a 10-step programme -- including educating mothers on the benefits of breast-feeding and helping them to initiate the practice within a half-hour of birth. It also calls on maternity wards to allow mothers and infants to remain in the same room together.

According to the plan, newborns should not be given any food or drink other than breast milk unless medically necessary, and mothers should be referred to breast-feeding support groups upon leaving the hospital.

James Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, said that numerous professional organizations, health professionals and Government representatives, including the Presidents of Finland, Mexico and Nigeria and the Surgeon General of the United States had pledged support for the plan.

The plan follows a resolution adopted this year by UNICEF's Executive Board which called on manufacturers and distributors of breast-milk substitutes to end free and low-cost supplies of infant formula to maternity wards and hospitals by the end of 1992. Following a meeting between Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of WHO, Mr. Grant and the President of the International Association of Infant Food Manufacturers (IFM), Peter Borasio, members of IFM agreed with the goal of ending donations of low-priced supplies of infant formula to maternity wards and hospitals, and pledged their full cooperation in those efforts.

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The United Nations Population Division has released a report on World Ubanization Prospects 1990, which indicates that 45 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas last year.

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According to the report, 37 per cent of the population of the less developed regions and 73 per cent of the people of the more developed regions were urban dwellers.

United Nations projections indicate that the level of urbanization for the world as a whole is expected to increase to 51 per cent in the year 2000.

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The Committee on Relations with the Host Country has decided to inform the Secretary-General of the "particularly grave" problem of indebtedness facing several missions to the United Nations due to "major political upheavals" in their countries.

By the text of a letter approved yesterday afternoon, the Committee Chairman, Constantine Moushoutas of Cyprus, will report on the Committee's consideration of possible responses to the problem, including creation of an emergency fund administered by the United Nations, group health insurance programmes and temporary short-term employment in the Secretariat.

Speaking on the matter, a representative of the United Nations Office of the Legal Counsel said the United Nations was not in a position to recognize any legal liability regarding the insolvency of missions.

In the letter to the Secretary-General, the Committee said that, while awaiting a reply, it would continue to look for ways to alleviate the situation of the worst-affected missions, many of whom require emergency food donations.

At the meeting, the representative of the United States reported that 100 parcels of food had recently been provided to a mission which had not been paid by its Government for a year.

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A meeting in Madrid held under the sponsorship of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to negotiate a treaty that will protect the world's many species has ended with hope for an agreed treaty by next June.

At the close of the eight-day session, Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP, told delegates from 76 developing countries and 13 international organizations that he now believed there was a strong chance for a meaningful international agreement by June of next year, when the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development will take place in Rio de Janeiro.

Mr. Tolba said progress had been made on the most difficult issues -- access to biological resources, access to technology and its transfer, and financing mechanisms, but added that tough bargaining still lay ahead.

A further negotiating session is scheduled from 23 September to 3 October in Nairobi, and Mr. Tolba expressed hope for what he called "a draft treaty bearing the fingerprints of Governments", by early October.

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